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THE  
Home Mission Task

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An Introductory Statement

By

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156 FIFTH AVENUE  
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**THE REASON**      On March 22, 1918, a complimentary luncheon was given the new Executive Secretary of the Home Missions Council in the rooms of the Aldine Club of New York City by representatives of the Boards of the different denominational home mission organizations composing the Home Missions Council, and by representatives of other kindred bodies.

Not for the purposes of instruction, nor with any novel program, or even fresh and original statement, yet for the purpose of imparting an atmosphere, and of indicating a spirit in which home missionary enterprises must to-day be considered, the new Secretary uttered the following address as a kind of inaugural. The value of these words, if they have value, consists in their socializing common sentiments; or, to use an Apostle's phrase, they are intended to stir up pure minds by way of remembrance.

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*Executive Secretary.*

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New York City.

## THE HOME MISSION TASK

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### **A COMMON MISSION**

The task of Foreign Missions and the task of Home Missions are one and the same,—it is to win the world to Jesus Christ, or, to use the New Testament phrase, “to make disciples of all nations.” It is an ethnic, a cosmic task. Altho energies be used, and at times be almost exhausted, in attention to minor details and in the doing of lesser deeds, yet the Christian’s ambition must not lose sight of the ultimate goal, the coming of the Kingdom throughout the entire world.

The task is staggering, yet it is ours. No man is equal to it, yet he must face it. And no man should lose sight of world missions, or content himself with anything less.

### **MUTUAL AND INTRO-ACTIVE**

Were Foreign Missions conducted more successfully, the Home Mission task would be reduced, for then the coming immigrant might arrive already converted to Christ. Happy the day for America if this were the case even ten fold that which is now true! If the Home Mission task were more perfectly accomplished, then would the Foreign Mission task be relieved and marvelously promoted, for then the multitude of strangers who have

sojourned in America for a season, and are returning to their native land, would carry back, emplanted in their own breasts, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and would become the most effective missionaries to their own peoples. In their inter-relations and cross-cuttings of influence and achievement the two missions are inseparable,—home and foreign.

**ANTI-  
PROVINCIAL**

In some respects Foreign Missions in their appeal to the home constituency have an advantage over Home Missions. There is a glamour of remoteness and mystery; “distance lends enchantment to the view.” In important ways Home Missions have an advantage over Foreign Missions, inasmuch as home mission funds are not heavily drained by the expense of administering work at great distances,—even half around the globe. Perhaps the advantage of close supervision by administrative heads in the home mission fields is more than offset by the necessity upon the Foreign Missionary of determining weighty matters by his own judgment, and of developing his own initiative and independence. But however the advantages and disadvantages may lie, they are but mere matters of administration and of human adjustment. In the sight of Heaven neither, we may well believe, takes precedence over the other. It is doubtful whether Heaven, or indeed whether we, if we were in Heaven, would use these distinguishing terms, “home” and “foreign.” Is America nearer the throne

of God than is Europe or Asia or Africa? Are other continents, or the islands of the seas, any more "foreign" to the Great Father than is America? We must avoid provincialism, if we would be truly Christian. We must yearn for, and work for, the world, if we would be perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect, who because of love for the world, gave His Only Begotten Son.

With sympathies comprehensive and universal we take up the task of Home Missions. It is not something over against some other thing. It is not a piece of work isolated and detached. It is a part of a great whole, and we must undertake it in the spirit of co-operation, to harmonize it and co-ordinate it with all other wholesome undertakings of the church and of society.

### **CHRISTIANIZ- ING AMERICA**

Free then of any divisive spirit, and opposed to any acts, or even phrases, which may seem to separate the Home Mission field from the world field, nevertheless as a matter of convenience for concentrating our attention, and directing our energies and efforts, we recognize that Home Mission activities are the activities of the church, chiefly in the United States and its dependencies, put forth in behalf of those who are not now already within her membership and fellowship. It is the task of the Christian Church in America,—meaning by America, the United States, Alaska, Porto Rico, the Sandwich Islands, and, in the phrase-

ology of many boards, in some instances Mexico, and in one instance at least San Salvador. Here is purely a geographical limitation.

## **DIPPING OUT THE SEA?**

With this limitation in mind, we may then define the Home Mission task as the task of Christianizing America. This is in itself almost appalling when looked at as a responsibility, almost impossible when aimed at as an achievement. How can America be Christianized! She is not safeguarded; there are no dykes nor bulwarks about her; she is threatened, indeed is flooded, with every religion, every irreligion, every evil, every monstrous perversion known in any part of the world. She has, too, her own peculiar perils, perils incident to a democracy, where liberty, misjudged, is ever advocated in terms of license. That the task is vast is evidenced by the fact that there still remains so much to be accomplished, and that the progress of more than three centuries has, after all, been relatively so slight.

## **TWO OBJECTIVES**

What are the concrete objects toward which we should strive in our attempts to fulfill this great home mission undertaking? How can we point them out and phrase them in their simplest terms? I can think of but two single and simple objects with which the church, the church universal, should be content, if she can

by any means attain them. The first is to promote the spirit of brotherhood amongst men, and the second is to make keen in the hearts and lives of men the sense of God.

### **CHRISTIAN BROTHERHOOD**

Can we help men to realize that they are brothers? We have not yet fully succeeded in making Christians realize that they are of one household, brethren of one Elder Brother, children of one common Father, who should live together in peace, work together in concord, and worship together in the fulness of brotherly love. Can we break down religious barriers? We must. It is our task. There must be tolerated no hatred, no bitterness, no strife, not even competition. We must co-operate; we must think kindly and speak kindly one of another; we must help, not hinder each other; we must have common purposes, common plans, a common strategy. Here we must begin within the household of faith to re-establish and confirm the spirit of brotherhood. With nothing less must we be satisfied.

### **BETWEEN BOARDS**

The Home Mission task begins with the establishment of right relations between the Home Mission Boards, between churches, between denominations and amongst Christians. For the spirit of strife and competition, if it has ever existed, we must substitute the principles of arbitration and the equitable adjudication of differences



and the allotment of spheres of influence. We need not reduce different bodies to flat agreement and conformity. Far enough have we gone already to clearly understand this. We must be tolerant and inclusive, recognizing essential unity in the midst of many and apparently great diversities.

**INCLUSIVENESS** We must have quarrel with no other organization which is seeking the improvement of men, and the betterment of human institutions. There are religious organizations, not directly representing the church, but nevertheless tributary to the great objects of the church, with which we must coalesce and co-operate.

**PHILANTHROPIC** There are philanthropic, charitable and reformatory associations which, in the spirit of Christ, are promoting the objects for which He came amongst men.

**POLITICAL** There are political organizations and forms of government which are as worthy of our countenance and support as are any of those organizations which steady and make safe the foundations of human society. Can we be broadminded enough, and inclusive enough, to discover ever the good, to be judiciously tolerant and patient with imperfection, and to uphold and promote all of these manifold agencies for social regeneration and reconsecration?

**SOCIAL** Are we willing to enter into the spirit of the new age and behold how truly and how fully Jesus Christ, our Master, may become reincarnated by His spirit in institutions which we have been wont to call secular? Can we recognize essential Christianity, when, divested of ecclesiastical garb and habiliments, when expressed in non-liturgical and un-theological phrases? Are we prepared to find fellowship with the mind of Christ when it is formulated in the enactments of a legislature, or has become the current speech of men in business, or is met face to face on some street corner in a deed of mercy and gentleness, or is sacrificially expended in some heroic gift of life on a battlefield for one's country, or in an endeavor to save one's fellow-beings from disease, or from suffering, or from death? Shall barriers stand between us, and we walk within little precincts which we are pleased to call holy, when just over the border are other men as holy as we, judged by standards which in the minds of earnest men are as sound as the standards by which we judge?

**THE ESSENTIAL SPIRIT** Are we prepared to recognize the essential spirit of men, and of Christ, or shall we insist upon having externals to our liking? It is a part of the Home Mission task to bring the churches of Jesus Christ into sympathy and fellowship with all those institutions and organizations and men, who are seek-

ing in any measure the sound expression of righteousness and justice and mercy.

## **BROTHERHOOD IN DEMOCRACY**

Can we go further? Can we acknowledge the task as Home Missionary

which relates to the purification of politics and the democratization of American life? As I step from the door of my office building all Jewry seems to surge around me. These people coming and going, speaking many of them an unknown tongue, are not Christians, but by residence, by reason of proximity and propinquity, and in many instances by a transfer of allegiance, they are American. They are a part of my environment. Without asking it, perhaps even resenting it, they claim my sympathetic attention, they should have my fraternal regard and consideration. Toward them I must manifest the spirit of brotherhood. That is a part of my Home Missionary task; that is the task of the church in America to-day,—not simply to found missions in some extraneous sense, but to be gracious, to be brotherly, to overcome objections and prejudices, to claim and secure attention when there is indifference, if not indeed dislike.

Oh! this big task of exemplifying brotherhood amongst men, of moving in the spirit of Christ as he moved amongst the Galileans, the Judeans, and the Samaritans, unto whom Syro-Phenicians, Greeks and Romans came! It is our task. It has never been accomplished. But it claims us. We must hold it steadily

before us as a goal though we be years in attaining unto it.

The spirit of brotherhood is needed in the church, is needed by democracy, and is needed in the world.

### **VITAL RELIGION**

Then there is the other phase of our great task,—that of making religion real and vital amongst men. We know already in a theological and in a forensic way that men are “religious animals;” we know that they are “ineradicably religious.” But we are told also that they have become religiously indifferent; that they have become commercialized and secularized, and are gradually becoming hardened to all religious feelings. I have no case to argue. If the trend and tendency be in one direction, we must stay it; if it be in the other direction we must aid and accelerate it.

### **WHAT IS RELIGION?**

What is the experience of men who to-day on the battlefields of Europe, taking their lives in their hands, go steadily forward into the trenches, and “over the top”, having already deliberately thought out what it may mean to them? Are they religious? Many of them have no connection with any church,—have in many instances been apparently opposed to the church and all it stood for; and yet here they are altruistically offering the supreme sacrifice! I put the question again, are they religious? I must put another question, what is religion?

Do the churches represent it all? Has some of it escaped from ecclesiastical vessels, and been gathered up by other less holy receptacles?

What is religion? Have men caught a vision of it who use none of the phases with which we are familiar? If they know it at all in part, should we antagonize them, should we condemn them? We need not approve, but may we not sympathize with them and draw forth a yet fuller experience and expression of religious truth?

### **THE QUESTION OF AUTHORITY**

We are face to face with the question of authority. Shall a Pope be the last

Court of Appeal for religious faith and practice? Shall a man turn to the decisions and edicts of councils? Shall a man take a book and be governed literally by expressions which were framed in the speech and for the necessities of a people who lived under different circumstances nineteen centuries ago? Or may a man discover in his own soul,—illumined, mystically, if you please, by the spirit of Christ,—the principles which, tested as best he may by judgment and conscience, he shall term obligatory and binding upon him?

### **CHRISTIAN TOLERATION**

Can we deepen the sense of obligation to God, and strengthen the authority of conscience within men, and then willingly, even placidly, accept the consequences which may ensue? Unless we can do something of this

kind, it seems to me that we are in danger of reverting to the times when debate was deemed the needful remedy for differences of opinion, and dogma was regarded as a sure panacea for doubt. I trust we are happily by that time, and that tendency. It is a part of the Home Mission task to carry us by, and by the perils of theological controversy and inquisitorial insistence upon conformity. We are within the region of freedom of conscience, where the right of private of judgment may prevail, and where, with a fraternal spirit, we may recognize the essence of religion, though it be not at all in the forms of our choosing.

### **SPIRITUAL UNITY**

It is a great task in this American life of ours to find a common basis upon which Jew and Gentile may stand, unto which both Catholic and Protestant may resort. There is a spirit of which the great Apostle spoke, in which "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female"; —it is the spirit in which men, united in Christ Jesus, performed different functions, used different expressions, and vary as individuals must. It is not the spirit of uniformity, it is the spirit of unity.

### **THE DIVERSIFIED HOME MISSION TASK**

In this larger spirit of brotherhood and of essential religious experience let me tell you some of the minor things which I am called

upon to do as I come to this great metropolis, entrusted with the almost stupendous task of representing the Home Mission interests, in a very real sense, of *all the Christians in America*.

**AN OFFICE** I am to maintain an office as a center, concrete and objectified, of Home Missions co-operation, in which sectarian differences shall be forgotten, save as parts of wisdom to help one be wise.

**CORRESPONDENCE** I am to conduct the correspondence of the Home Missions Council, answering so far as I am able, all of the inquiries which may come to me, informing parties interested of obligations entailed in the membership and fellowship of the Home Missions Council, and seeing that each assumes his share and performs his part.

**LIBRARY OF INFORMATION** I am to gather and have on file, as a kind of clearing house of information, reports and samples of literature issued by different denominational boards, and also by organizations working in collateral fields. This may grow in time to a great library of Home Missions.

**PUBLICATIONS** I am to look after the publications, the annual report, circulars of information, or periodical literature, such as a quarterly, or monthly, if

determined upon, and be a first editor as well as business manager.

**PLATFORM  
MESSAGES**

On invitation it will be my duty, and privilege as well, to present the cause of Home Missions in the broader, interdenominational, or non-denominational aspects, to the denominational bodies in their annual or national assemblies.

**SURVEYS AND  
FEDERATIONS**

I am to arrange for and inaugurate forms of co-operative work in specified areas, as in states for example. This perhaps will be the greatest service I can render the cause of Christianity in America, if the Lord give me health and wisdom for a few years, and a fair amount of support from my brethren.

**INTERDENOMINAL  
ALLIANCES**

I am to help bring into more intimate acquaintance and closer co-operation the work of the Christian churches with other associations and organizations, both religious and philanthropic, educational and political. Here alone is a great piece of work, requiring almost the strength of a Hercules.

**SPECIFIC  
SERVICE**

Then there will come to me, either by assignment from the Home Missions Council, or by request from some other source, or because I dis-



cover them myself, opportunities for service in specific cases, such for example as discovering the significance of the migration of negroes from the south, and aiding in relating certain denominations to care for these negroes in the centers of their new settlement; such as investigating the needs of immigrants at our ports of entry, or as they spread westward or eastward over this great land; such as devising means by which there may be practical cooperation, either by the publication of a common literature, or by a union seminary for the training of ministers, or by the assignment of distinct nationalities to the different denominations, in ministering to the needs of foreign speaking people in our land. The opportunity for manifold and diversified activities in specific cases seems almost infinite, for there are Indians, there are men in mines and lumber camps, there are slums in great cities, there are isolated, detached hamlets, and wide areas with sparse population, there are seamen, there are men of almost every class and condition, any and all of whom belong within **my parish** and my charge, as a concentrated and corporate representative of the allied churches of America.

**A NEW  
PROGRAM?**

Then, above all else, if I were big enough and wise enough, it would be my duty, as it would be my privilege, to study the changed conditions of the church and the religious life in America, and, with the vision of a seer,

formulate a program for to-day, and for to-morrow, and for time to come.

**THE INSPIRATION  
OF A GREAT  
PURPOSE**

Does any man think there is but little to do?—that the open doors before an Executive secretary of the Home Missions Council give forth unto but meager opportunities? I have said the task is vast; it is stupendous;—exaggeration is scarcely possible;—and yet I do not shrink from it, I am inspired by it; it is a great opportunity. I am not equal to it; no man is equal to it; but I would rather devote myself to a great, even an impossible undertaking, than to spend myself upon trifles, which after all may scarcely be worth while; and I wish to talk with you, my associates, in terms of the largest dimensions when we speak of Home Mission tasks. I know our danger is of slacking back and forgetting these great aspects of our calling, of losing ourselves in the mass of trifling details. I wish to remind you and revive you, and have you remind me and revive me, when I grow luke-warm, or lose my vision of the call.

America has been committed to our charge for its safety and its salvation, as truly as the world was committed to the few Apostles, the many years ago on Calvary, when the Christ left them to carry on His work.



